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ABSTRACT

This research study examined the effect that a ninth grade introduction to the social studies course had upon student interest in the social studies. A group of 32 entering ninth grade students (20 boys and 12 girls) were chosen as the experimental group to take the course. Written in a series of units, the course was comprised of the disciplines of the social studies that were taught in the high school curriculum including anthropology, economics, geography, government, history, psychology, and sociology. These units were taught as mini courses within the quarter. Teaching techniques were geared toward more use of simulation, gaming, experiments, map skills, word games, filmstrips, and films than are traditionally used in most classrooms. While mastery of the normal discipline content was not the focus of the course, terminology was introduced and reviewed as it related to the discipline. It was anticipated that, through brief but direct student involvement in experiences and skills normally acquired and practiced in a discipline, students would become motivated and desire a knowledge of the discipline. At the beginning of the course, the group was administered the H. H. Remmer's "A Scale to Measure Attitude Toward Any School Subject" Form A. The scale was administered to the group again at the end of the course and a final time at the end of four years of high school. Findings show that there was no significant gain in interest in social studies immediately following the course. However, by the time the group had completed four years in high school, they expressed a significantly higher interest in the social studies. An outline of the course is included. (Author/RM)

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THE EFFECT OF AN INTRODUCTORY COURSE TO THE SOCIAL STUDIES UPON STUDENTS' INTEREST IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES

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Introduction

One of the features of the high school quarter system is the students' selection of course offerings within the school curriculum. Each quarter students choose subjects in which they spend their time and efforts as they acquire knowledge and/or skills from these courses. Because of the lack of knowledge of which courses are the most desirable, the high school student is often confused and frustrated. This is especially true as the student attempts to make course selections within the social studies. Students may choose from many disciplines within the social studies such as anthropology, economics, geography, government, history, psychology, or sociology.

In Whitfield County, Georgia, an introduction to the social studies course was developed and implemented. This course was taught on the ninth grade level. One of the purposes of the course was to orient students to the many areas of the social studies and to aid them in making competent choices during their high school years.

Whitfield County is located in the upper northwest portion of Georgia. It lies just south of Chattanooga, Tennessee. The county has a population of approximately 72,000 people. The primary industry is carpet manufacturing.

Southeast Whitfield Comprehensive High School, one of the two high schools where the course was offered, was formed in the 1975-76 school year when two smaller high schools were combined to form a comprehensive high school. During the five years of its existence, the school's population has varied from 1,000 to 1,250 students. The majority of the students come from lower middle class homes. Seventy percent of the students' parents are employed in the carpet industry or carpet related industries. Ninety-eight percent of the student population is white. Approximately forty percent of the students who have graduated continued in some form of post-secondary education. About twenty-five percent attend college and another

fifteen percent attend vocational trade schools.

It was found that little research had been done on an introduction course designed to increase a student's interest in a subject matter area. However, studies did exist that were closely related to this topic. These studies were done on students' interest in a course, in this instance the social studies.

Motivation is closely related to a student's interest in a particular subject. Metcalf (1966) stated that students were not highly motivated toward social studies. He believed there was a definite relationship between this low interest and forgetfulness. Fernandex, Massey, and Dornbusch (1975) found a reason for this lack of motivation. They found that students believed the social studies were less important for their occupational future than were the other academic subjects. However, Anderson and Steinle (1978) conducted a similar study in Australia. Although they found students ranked social studies as having an unimportant relevance for future occupations, their students expressed a high interest in the social studies.

Another area closely related to students' interest in social studies is the teaching methods social studies teachers use. Eham (1970) carried out a study of normative discourse in 28 different classes and collected data on the students' attitudes in these social studies classes. He found that the kind of discourse was more important in affecting change in student attitude rather than the amount of discourse occurring in the social studies classroom. In a one-year instructional methods project to study students' attitudes based on different instructional modules of self-paced learning and instructional objective packages, Hassan (1977) found that attitudes did improve with the use of these teaching methods.

Seeking the development of motivation in students in the area of social studies through certain teaching methodology was a part of the aim of the introduction course to the social studies. There was one study that did relate more directly to the course's central aim, that of orienting students to their choices in social studies curricular offerings. Callahgan (1969) stated that the flexible content curriculum of the quarter system did improve attitudes of students toward social studies courses. The reason for this was the students' being able to select what to study and the students' having influence on what was included in the course content.

Because of the lack of studies relating directly to the main reason for the introduction to the social studies course, a study was needed to determine what effect this course would have upon student interest in the social studies.

Introduction to Social Studies Course

Recognizing the need to orient students into the high school social studies curriculum, a group of social studies teachers in Whitfield County developed an introduction to the social studies course. The course was submitted to the Whitfield County School Curriculum Committee and was approved for implementation in the 1974-75 school year. The course was written in a series of units that comprised the disciplines of the social studies that were taught in the high school curriculum. Those courses included anthropology, economics, geography, government, history, psychology, and sociology. These units were taught as mini-courses within the quarter. Mastery of the normal discipline content was not the focus. However, terminology was introduced and reviewed as it related to the discipline. Teaching techniques were geared toward more use of simulation, gaming, experiments, map skills, word games, filmstrip kits, and films than are traditionally used in most classrooms. In short, it was an effort to

present the discipline in a manner that involved the students through participation in fun-related activities. It was anticipated that, through brief but direct student involvement in experiences and skills normally acquired and practiced in a discipline, students would become motivated and desire a knowledge of the discipline. This would aid the students in making competent curriculum choices throughout their high school career.

The outline of the course is as follows:

COURSE NAME: Introduction to Social Studies

I. STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS:

Suggested for ninth graders

II. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The course is designed to familiarize students with all the social studies that they will be exposed to in greater detail as they progress through high school.

The course should give guidance to the students in planning future courses in the social studies during high school.

III. ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS:

Class will meet the equivalent of five days per week, for one quarter. Credit: 5 quarter hours.

IV. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the course, the student will be able to do the following as a minimum test of proficiency:

1. History

   A. Explain time concepts.
   B. Tell how history can be studied.
   C. Tell how history is made.
   D. Justify the study of history.

2. Political Science and Government

   A. Write a few paragraphs on the need for government.
   B. Explain the general characteristics of government in the United States.
   C. Explain how people affect government.

3. Geography

   A. Explain briefly the work of geographers and the uses we have for their work.
   B. Tell how geography helps determine patterns of settlement, work, history, etc.
   C. Demonstrate some ability in map reading through the use of outline maps and written explanations.

4. Economics

   A. Express a basic understanding of the need, production, and distribution of goods and service.
   B. Express a basic understanding of the concept of supply and demand.

5. Sociology

   A. Define the work of sociology.
   B. Name the tools and techniques used by sociologists.

6. Anthropology

   A. Define the work of anthropologists.
   B. Explain the need for anthropologists in helping us understand more about our world.

7. Psychology

   A. Define the study of psychology.
   B. List how psychologist and our study of psychology help us understand more about ourselves.

The students would at the end of the quarter be able to chart their way through the disciplines of social studies, knowing basically what each subject deals with in content.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. History

   A. Time Concepts.

      1. Centuries, A.D., B.C., etc.
      2. Historical periods.

   B. How history can be studied.

      1. Historical methods or research.
      2. Sources (primary and secondary).
      3. Separating fact from opinion.

C. How history is made.

1. History is the study of man.
2. How man has tried to learn about himself, his past, his societies, his physical environment.

D. Why study history?

1. It is a process of reconsidering beliefs.
2. To study man's values throughout history.
3. To help determine a frame of reference.

II. Political Science and Government

A. Need for Government.

1. Nature of man (Locke and Rousseau).
2. Background and development of governments.

B. General characteristics of U.S. Government.

1. Democracy as an outgrowth of natural law.
2. English influence on American democracy.

C. How people affect government.

1. Public opinion.
2. Political parties.
3. Pressure groups.

III. Geography

A. Geographers and their work.

1. Needs and uses of their knowledge.
2. Changes in the study of geography.
3. Tools used in studying geography.

B. How geography helps determine patterns of settlement, work, etc.

1. Populations.
2. Resource.
3. Climate.

C. Map skills.

1. Map legends.
2. Longitude and latitude.
3. Familiarity with types of maps: Political, Demographic, Climate, Regional, Sectional.

IV. Economics

A. Concepts of need, production, and distribution of goods and services.

B. Basic theory of supply and demand.

1. Inflation.
2. Depression.
3. Recession.
4. GNP.

V. Anthropology and Sociology

A. Basic concepts and developments of cultures and societies.

B. Tools and techniques used by anthropologists and sociologists.

VI. Psychology

A. Basic theories and concepts of the study of psychologists.

B. The importance of the study in relation to helping us understand ourselves.

C. Techniques and developments by famous psychologists.

Evaluation

1. Teacher made test on content.

2. Individual students performances.

Experimental Process

At Southeast Whitfield Comprehensive High School in the fall quarter of 1976, a group of 32 entering ninth grade students (20 boys and 12 girls) were chosen as an experimental group to determine if the introduction to a social studies course would increase their interest in social studies. At the beginning of the course, the group was administered the H. H. Remmer's "A Scale to Measure Attitude Toward Any School Subject," Form A as a pretest of interest in social studies. This attitude scale is a part of the Purdue Master Attitude Scales. On this scale students were instructed to respond to the questions comparing interest in the four major academic areas of English, math, science, and social studies.

The scale was administered again at the end of the quarter as a posttest for interest in social studies. At the end of the four years of high school, the entire experimental group was still at Southeast Whitfield Comprehensive High School. The Remmer scale was again administered a third time to the group to determine if there was any change in interest in social studies since the beginning of the ninth grade.

To determine if there was any significant gain in interest in the social studies within the experimental group because of the introduction to social studies course at the ninth grade level, a dependent t-test was calculated. Results of this calculation are given in Table I.

Table I

Gain Means Score, Standard Deviation, and Value Between the Pretest and Posttest of the Group on the Remmer's Attitude Scale

Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Value
0.06	2.27	0.49

At the .05 level of significance, there was no significant difference in the gains in interest in social studies because of the introduction to social studies course at the ninth grade level.

To determine if there was any significant gain in interest in the social studies within the experimental group between the beginning of the course at the ninth grade level and the time when the group completed four years of high school, a dependent t-test was calculated. Results of this calculation are given in Table II.

Table II

Gain Means Score, Standard Deviation, and Value Between the Beginning of the Course and Completion of Four Years of High School by the Experimental Group on Remmer's Attitude Scale

Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Value
0.95	2.62	2.13*

*Significant at the .05 level.

At the .05 level of significance, there was a significant increase in gain in interest in the social studies by the experimental group from the beginning of the course at the ninth grade level and the end of the four years in high school.

Discussion

Although there was no significant gain in interest in social studies during the quarter the experimental group was enrolled in the introduction to the social studies course at the beginning of their ninth year in school, this group expressed a significantly higher interest in the social studies by the time they had completed four years in high school. Many things could have contributed to this increase in interest in the social studies. The social studies faculty at Southeast Whitfield Comprehensive High School feel they are competent teachers who are able to motivate students. A variety of teaching methods are used in their classes. However, it is felt that the introduction to the social studies course did make a positive contribution to student interest in the social studies because it gave these students a basis for their choices from the social studies curricular offerings during the students' high school years.

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